NCA
VOC FOR PGM/FN
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-5844 MAY 23, 1978
RON PEMSTEIN/VIENNA

ROMANIA'S "PASSPORT DISSIDENTS"

ANNCR:

A NEW SORT OF DISSIDENT HAS COME TO ATTENTION IN ROMANIA. THESE ARE THE SO-CALLED PASSPORT DISSIDENTS -- PEOPLE WITH FEW POLITICAL VIEWS WHO ONLY WANT TO LEAVE ROMANIA. CORRESPONDENT RON PEMSTEIN TALKED WITH A LEADER OF ONE OF THE GROUPS IN VIENNA AND SENT US THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

PETRE NEGREANU IS TWENTY-SIX YEARS OLD. BECAUSE OF THE THE LINES ON HIS FACE, HE APPEARS MUCH OLDER. LIKE HIS FRIENDS, HE IS A LABORER, A WROUGHT-IRON WORKER WHO HAS KNOWN NOTHING ELSE BUT COMMUNIST ROMANIA.

PETRE SPEAKS VAGUELY ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS. LIFE IN ROMANIA IS JUST WORK, WORK, WORK, HE SAYS. BUT THE MAIN CAUSE OF HIS DISSATISFACTION SEEMS HIS LACK OF FREEDOM TO TRAVEL WHEREVER HE LIKES OR TO EMIGRATE. MISTER NEGREANU IS LUCKY. BECAUSE OF HIS CONTACTS WITH FOREIGN JOURNALISTS IN BUCHAREST, AND OFFICIAL CONCERN THAT HE MIGHT BECOME A CAUSE CELEBRE, HE WAS FINALLY GIVEN A PASSPORT.

NEWLY ARRIVED HERE IN VIENNA, MISTER NEGREANU IS INQUIRING ABOUT WORK PROSPECTS IN SOUTH AFRICA OR AUSTRALIA. HE'S ALSO PUBLICIZING THE CASES OF ROMANIANS WAITING FOR PASSPORTS, ALL WORKERS OR STUDENTS RANGING IN AGE FROM TWENTY TO TWENTY-SEVEN.

THEY CAME TO PUBLIC ATTENTION JUST LAST MONTH WHEN THEY ORGANIZED A DEMONSTRATION FOR APRIL TENTH, TWO DAYS BEFORE PRESIDENT NICOLAE CEAUSESCU LEFT FOR A VITIT TO THE UNITED STATES. THEY WANTED TO PARADE WITH SLOGANS SAYING: IF CEAUSESCU CAN TRAVEL TO THE WEST, WHY CANT WE?

ARRIVING IN BUCHAREST ON APRIL TENTH, THIS CORRESPONDENT SAW ABOUT ONE HUNDRED POLICEMEN GATHERED AROUND THE INTERCONTINENTAL HOTEL. THE DEMONSTRATION DID NOT TAKE PLACE, MISTER NEGREANU SAID, BECAUSE THE SISTER OF ONE OF THE DEMONSTRATORS INFORMED THE POLICE. THE NEXT DAY, MISTER NEGREANU AND HIS GROUP PARADED BRIEFLY IN THE SQUARE IN FRONT OF THE PRESIDENTIAL PALACE. POLICE BROKE UP THE DEMONSTRATION AND DETAINED ABOUT FIFTEEN OF THEM FOR THREE DAYS.

UNLESS A ROMANIAN IS JEWISH OR OF GERMAN ORIGIN, OR HAS CLOSE RELATIVES ABROAD, EMIGRATION IS PRACTICALLY IMPOSSIBLE. TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS HAVE BEEN TIGHTENED SINCE 1975, A SITUATION THAT HAS BROUGHT ABOUT THE FORMATION OF THESE SMALL GROUPS OF NON-POLITICAL PASSPORT DISSIDENTS. WRITER PAUL GOMA, A DISSIDENT NOW IN FRANCE, COMPLAINED THAT MANY OF THE PEOPLE SIGNING HIS HUMAN RIGHTS PETITION LAST YEAR, ONLY WANTED PASSPORTS, NOT CHANGES IN ROMANIAN SOCIETY.

THE PASSPORT DISSIDENTS BELIEVE PUBLICITY, ESPECIALLY ON THE AMERICAN FINANCED RADIO FREE EUROPE, IS THEIR BEST HOPE TO LEAVE ROMANIA. IN THE MEANTIME, MISTER NEGREANU SAYS, THEY ARE ENDURING HARRASSMENT AND HUMILIATION BY POLICE. THE TWO-METER TALL NEGREANU, TOLD HE APPEARED OLDER THAN TWENTY-SIX COMMENTED, I'VE HAD MANY TROUBLES IN MY LIFE.

WJL/PY